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McLaughlin: One-on-One

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National Security Adviser John Poindexter Interviewed

JOHN MCLAUGHLIN: The Soviets say all or nothing at all. If Ronald Reagan won't give up the Strategic Defense Initiative, Mikhail Gorbachev won't give up his nuclear weapons. Will President Reagan yield? This official ought to know.

Born, Washington, Indiana. Fifty years of age. Wife, the Reverend Linda Goodwin Poindexter, 28 years, five sons. U.S. Naval Academy, ensign, graduated first in his class. California Institute of Technology, Ph.D., nuclear physics. U.S. Navy, 28 years and currently, 31st Destroyer Squadron, battle group anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare commander, Western Pacific, Indian Ocean, South Pacific, two years. Johnson Administration, Defense Department Assistant Secretary, three years. Nixon Administration Navy Secretary Chafee, Warner, Middendorf, administrative aide to all three, three years. Ford Administration, Chief of Naval Operations, Holloway, executive assistant to, two years. Naval Education and Training Command, Pensacola, Chief of Staff, three years. Reagan Administration, military and deputy assistant, four and a half years. National Security Council adviser to the President, ten months and currently. Honors: Legion of Merit with Gold Star, Meritorious Service Medal, and others.

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Vice Admiral John Marlon Poindexter, it's one-on-one.

The Soviets have gone back and forth on the proposition of whether the intermediate nuclear forces, the Euromissiles, are coupled or decoupled to the Strategic Defense Initiative. It appeared that Victor Karpov has been saying that indeed there's no reason to feel that linkage is an absolute requirement. But we heard late on Friday and Thursday that indeed it's all one package, everything is linked.

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MCLAUGHLIN: Is he modest? Is he aggressive?

ADMIRAL POINDEXTER: He is aggressive from the standpoint of pushing what he wants.

MCLAUGHLIN: Is he cerebral or is he emotional?

ADMIRAL POINDEXTER: He, I would think, is -- he gives controlled answers.

MCLAUGHLIN: Do you sense passion behind his reasoning and his expression?

ADMIRAL POINDEXTER: I would -- more than passion, I would describe it as determination.

MCLAUGHLIN: Let me shift the subject a little bit. In mid-August you apparently drew up a memorandum with regard to Muammar Qaddafi, who continues to be an international outlaw. And you told the President that you were going to embark on some disinformation activity in order to destabilize Qaddafi. You were going to lead him to believe, through a series of illusory events, that his political base was weak, etcetera. Then that was transmitted to the press, leaked to the press -- the Wall Street Journal, noticeably -- and headlines appeared to the effect that U.S. and Libya are on a collision course and Qaddafi is plotting new terrorist attacks. And you're now subject to the criticism that you are deliberately and have consciously contrived to deceive the American press.

What do you say to that?

ADMIRAL POINDEXTER: Well, those are obviously very serious charges. But the fact is that they're not true.

As I think the public understands, we have been concerned about the threat of terrorism that has been generated by Colonel Qaddafi and Libya for some period of time. In trying to combat that threat, one of the things that we recently decided to do was to initiate a deception program.

MCLAUGHLIN: Against Qaddafi.

ADMIRAL POINDEXTER: Against Qaddafi.

MCLAUGHLIN: Did you want to enlist the press as the instrument of that deception -- deceptive effect on Qaddafi?

ADMIRAL POINDEXTER: Not at all. We have never have, and we will never have, a program to provide disinformation to the American press.

MCLAUGHLIN: But you have an official in your shop, and he's in charge of political and military affairs, and he communicated directly with the reporter of the Wall Street Journal. Did he not transmit to him the phony deceptions?

ADMIRAL POINDEXTER: We've analyzed the John Walcott article that appeared in the Wall Street Journal on August the 25th. About -- over -- in fact, over 90 percent of the facts in the article are correct. The things that are incorrect about the article are some of the inferences drawn by the author of the article and the headline.

My staff office did talk to John Walcott, but he talked to him after John had all of the facts and had the story practically written.

MCLAUGHLIN: Was that a joint headline? Was there a Cairo headline under that too? Didn't part of that story come out of Cairo?

ADMIRAL POINDEXTER: I can't recall that for sure. It's been a while since I looked at the article.

The main point, though, John, is that we did not have a disinformation program oriented toward the press to mislead the press. We will stand by all of the comments we made about the Wall Street Journal article.

MCLAUGHLIN: But you said that the article, the story was authoritative. Does that not suggest that it's a true story?

ADMIRAL POINDEXTER: I have always characterized the article as basically accurate, and that is in terms of the facts that are in the article. We were really not ever commenting on the inferences drawn by the author of the article.

Obviously, there's a narrow line between disinformation and deception. In this particular case, the kind of disinformation that we were talking about was disinformation in such a way that it would deceive Qaddafi. And it was never targeted at the American press.

MCLAUGHLIN: We'll be right back.

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MCLAUGHLIN: Mega-question. An intuition from you. Will Reagan meet with Gorbachev before Reagan leaves office?

ADMIRAL POINDEXTER: I think he will, John. I think that we've got to be able to make progress. Geneva is important

10

to us. And he'll meet with him.

MCLAUGHLIN: Thanks for being my guest on One-on-One.